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THE ANGLICAN DIGEST
CONNECTS THE CHURCHES
OF THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION
BY GATHERING ARTICLES THAT
TELL THE STORY OF THE FAITH.

FROM THE EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

GENEROSITY

THE REV. JONATHAN A. MITCHICAN
RECTOR, CHURCH OF THE HOLY
COMFORTER, DREXEL HILL, PA

THE ANGLICAN DIGEST has been going through something of a renaissance in the last year. Back in 1958, when TAD first went to print, the vision of Father Howard Lane Foland was that it would be a gathering place for articles from around the Anglican Communion that would connect readers with the heart and soul of what it means to be a Christian in the world today. The world has changed quite a bit since then, but Christians around the world still have powerful stories to tell — stories that make us laugh, cry, think, pray, or smile. TAD is changing to meet the needs of a changing world, but it is not changing its mission to gather and share those stories with you.

Starting with this issue, each issue of TAD will center on a theme. This issue's theme is "Generosity." The authors of the articles in this issue have each tried to tackle this theme in a different way. There are a number of different mediums represented in this issue — essays, personal stories, poems, sermons, and even repurposed blog posts — but each piece expresses the way in which giving all that we have mysteriously fills our hearts even as it empties us.

The liturgical seasons of Advent and Christmas seem particularly good for reflecting on the topic of generosity. Christmas reminds us of the great generosity of a God who gave his only Son for the sake of a world that was not interested in being saved, but that needed saving all the same. Advent points us to the even greater generosity of the sac-

rifice of the cross and the fact that in time all things will be made new because of Jesus. All our acts of generosity, small or large, ultimately point back to Jesus and the breathtaking generosity of God.

I am proud to be joining the Rev. Anthony F. M. Clavier and Ms. Catherine S. Salmon as Co-Editors of THE ANGLICAN DIGEST. This is a wonderful publication with a rich history that still has a lot to offer to the ongoing life of the Church. I hope you will find in each issue cause for comfort, challenge, and celebration — and, if you are feeling particularly generous, I hope that after you read this issue, you will give it to someone who may not yet know about TAD, or someone who may not have seen it in a while. The more we build our readership, the more stories we will be able to share, and the more blessed we will all be.

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THE GIFT OF TIME

THE REV. CANON J M HASELOCK,
PRECENTOR AND VICE-DEAN,
NORWICH CATHEDRAL CHAPLAIN
TO HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN

I suppose it is a sign of age, but I am beginning to look back and remember the old days with nostalgia. *A la recherche du temps perdu*, as Proust would have it — “The Remembrance of Things Past”, or, more literally, “In Search of Time Lost.” In the good old days, the third Sunday of Advent used to be known as *Gaudete Sunday*, from the first word of the old Latin entrance antiphon or introit sung on this day. It was a copy of the *Laetare Sunday* of mid-Lent when rose-coloured vestments were worn and the prevailing mood of Lenten austerity was lifted before intensifying again in the immediate run-up to Holy Week. The word *Gaudete* means Rejoice, and the scriptures appointed for the day sound an appropriately rosy note of rejoicing as the

Church prepares for the celebration of Christmas.

Isaiah sets the tone as he rejoices in the way even the parched earth will blossom and flourish as God makes himself known. “*The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing.*” As I read this, my mind’s eye clearly sees the crocuses and irises blooming on the verges of the King’s Highway as our God comes near to us:

*In the desert trees take root
Fresh from his creation;
Plants and flowers and
sweetest fruit
Join the celebration.*

Isaiah’s amazing vision foresaw a new and radical healing and wholeness in all creation which would herald God’s coming near to his people.

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the

deaf unstopped; then shall the lame leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.

John the Baptizer knew those words of prophecy from Isaiah, and he understood the signs and wonders foretold in them as indicative of the advent of the long awaited Messiah. So when the imprisoned Baptist sends messengers to enquire of Jesus whether he is the one for whom they are looking, the one they are expecting, the Lord has only to quote from the prophecy and point to its fulfilment in his ministry to demonstrate that he is undoubtedly the One. Isaiah foretells a time of rejoicing, a time in which nature itself rejoices and fulfils its potential. The message of Jesus to John is clear. The time of rejoicing has come. Now is the acceptable time.

One of the great themes of Advent is TIME itself: Ends and Beginnings — the end of the world, the Four Last Things. When I was ordained, we were taught that those great ultimates — Death, Judgement, Heaven, Hell — were the proper stuff of Advent sermons. These awesome endings and the vulnerable new beginning in the stable at Bethlehem are all brought into our awareness in what we sing, say, or hear at this time of the year. I have often thought it paradoxical that, as the Church begins her liturgical year, she directs us to consider the end of all time — the *eschaton* and the *parousia* — when Christ will come to be our judge. One of the things for which we will stand under judgement is Time. How have we used the time God has given us? Do we consider ourselves responsible for what we do with the gift of time? Are we responsible stewards? Do we live as Christians should

sub specie aeternitatis, in the perspective of eternity, or do we simply live for the moment? Do we fritter away our time, giving little back to God in worship and service, and far more to ourselves in our own gratification?

I am sure the boredom of which so many people complain would vanish if we learned to use our time more wisely, and with God in view. This is a great cause for concern today, when all the signs point to increased leisure, less intensive employment, more time to kill. Advent teaches us that all time is God's time. It is a gracious gift but it will come to an end, the sands will run out. Where shall we be then?

In a sense, old time ran out at Bethlehem. There, in the manger, in a stable smelling of straw and animals, God came into his world, old and worn-out as it was, and gave it a new start. He inau-

gurated the age of the New Testament, the New Covenant, in which fresh starts are possible for all, where the limitations of time and the freedom of eternity blend. And as we share the life of Jesus, the child in the manger's straw, we are children of a new age. The tyranny of the old yields to the kingdom of grace.

I hope this means something to you as you are swept through the shopping mall by the secular tide of last-minute Christmas demands. The Church wants us to all to sit back, to make time, to think seriously about the solemn message of Christmas:

*And is it true? And is it true,
This most tremendous tale
of all,
Seen in a stained-glass
window's hue,
A baby in an ox's stall?
The Maker of the stars and sea
Became a child on earth
for me?*

In the light of this most tremendous truth, we need to weigh up our lives, our priorities, our attitudes, and set them alongside the gift we are to receive in our coming celebration of our Lord's birth. Yes, this is Judgement. Not just a "Last Thing," but a present reality. As far as possible, when we come to Christ's Mass at the end of Advent, we should have done our best to prepare ourselves properly and duly for so great and awesome a celebration. I am one who still turns every now and again to Evelyn Underhill, whose writing is too little read these days. In a favourite passage of mine she says: *"We should ask the Lord to penetrate those murky corners where we hide the memories, and tendencies on which we do not care to look, but which we will not disinter and yield freely up to him, that he may purify and transmute them. The persistent buried grudge, the half acknowledged enmity,*

which is still smouldering; the bitterness of that loss we have not turned into sacrifice, the private comfort we cling to, the secret fear of failure which saps our initiative and is really inverted pride; the pessimism which is an insult to Christ's joy. Bring all these to the Lord, review them with shame and penitence in his steadfast light." Full and frank examination of conscience is a vital part of real Advent preparation and, if it helps there will always be a priest available somewhere at pre-arranged times and by appointment in your district to celebrate with those who wish it the sacrament of penance and reconciliation.

In those churches where things are done properly and well, a great deal of other kinds of preparation precede the feast of Christ's nativity, and it is right that it should be so. People are busy around their buildings, cleaning, decorating, and generally getting

ready for the Carol Services, the Midnight Mass, and the services of Christmas Day. Cribs are being prepared, music is being rehearsed, hosts of angels are being dusted down, re-gilded, and got ready for flight. Busy people are managing to find time in busy lives to devote to this necessary work of preparation, but eventually it will all be done and they will depart for home. Then, for a short while, silence will reign as it has done each eve of Christmas for centuries. We should be able to feel this atmosphere of expectation in our hearts and, coming at the end of Advent, it will sum up for those who can experience it what the season has been all about. When the bustle is over, the practical tasks done, when we have accomplished all that we can do ourselves, we wait for God to come and take over — and suddenly, that is what happens. The congregation assembles, the organ swells and, as time and eternity meet in

the Mass of Christmas once again, we are swept up and carried along in wonder and in praise. The time of rejoicing comes upon us. *Temps perdu* becomes *temps retrouvé* — no need for nostalgia when there is the joy and delight of God's now! Weak hands are strengthened, feeble knees made firm. And every year it is new despite the familiarity of the hymns, the carols, and the readings. Something new invades our lives and raises heart and mind to new aspirations. Our God is with us! Emmanuel — born as man, time drops away and we are young again!

*So shall thy birthday morn,
Lord Christ, our birthday be,
Then greet we all, ourselves
new-born,
Our King's nativity.*

THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE (VERSUS MY DARKENED HEART)

BY RENÉE PAQUIN NEWBERRY

Here is my heart. Don't you
See it? It is weak, I know, a dying
Star, red and hot and furious, loathing
Itself and the pestering cosmos surrounding
It. Perhaps, if it were gentler with itself, forgiving
Its misgivings, missteps, mistakes, perhaps
It would pump what light it has, bursting forth
Fruits to enlighten this bleak world.

Here is its little light, compelling
Charity, this flicker yet looming in its brevity,
As it urges me on to give with freedom, courage
To entrust my two hands to Goodness, but
(Perhaps) not greatness. And so, there is a war
Inside: the Empath versus the Seeker
Of Fame, of All that is Lush and Opulent. It is
The Spirit versus the Flesh. It is

A curse. And yet, each has his burden, no? Each
His languid, moribund heart reminding
Him that he is uniquely nothing, nobody, zero. But
That pinhole of light: It contradicts. It is its own
Universe. It argues for a single ray rupturing
The darkest heart, a heart attack of generosity, exacting
An imperfect forgiveness of myself, of others — nothing is
Perfect here. And so my actions, all of them, are called to be
An oblation of catholic love, more than me, greater
Than my myriad misdeeds. I give more: I become
More. It is a blessing. The pinhole widens.

ADVENT MEDITATION

THE REV. MATTHEW ZIMMERMAN
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LAWRENCE, KS

"Unto you a child will be born..."

Thirty-one years ago, I became a father. Madelaine's first Christmas holds the record as the coldest Christmas in Olathe's history – it was 16 degrees below zero.

When we brought her home from the hospital, I was carrying her completely covered through the door from the garage into the house. She suddenly sighed in a way I had never heard from any other baby.

A baby coming through that door changed my life for good. A strong man could have come through and beat me up, but I would have healed. He could have killed

me, but I would just be dead. A baby coming through the door changed me in ways no one else or even I could have changed myself. She changed everything — Cate, the house, the car with the ever-present car seat — everything.

Mary's words, known as the *Magnificat*, speak of the world being turned on its head with the arrival of Jesus. Babies have a way of turning our worlds upside down. It makes great sense that God's Word came among us as a baby.

We are waiting for someone to come through the door of our life in so many ways. We carry many things through the door of our lives. Advent asks us to consider the choice – our only power. "For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many." The challenge of the spiritual life is to know how to guard the door and open it at the same time.

WELL BEGUN: A MEDITATION FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

REV. STEVEN A. PEAY, PH.D.

DEAN FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS AND
PROFESSOR OF HOMILETICS AND
CHURCH HISTORY AT NASHOTAH
HOUSE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

“Well begun is half done.” Have you ever heard that proverb before? I remember my Grandmother saying it to me; and a number of teachers I’ve had through the years have said it as well. “Well begun is half done.” I thought of it as I read the texts for the second Sunday of Advent, and then again as I listened to the Holiday Pops Concert at the Symphony as I thought of the work of the arranger and the time musicians. Aristotle was right — yes, the phrase is his, and comes from *The Politics*: “Well begun is half done.”

Advent is the season of “well begun”, and reminds us that there are beginnings even be-

fore beginnings. John Shea, theologian and storyteller, points this out when he writes: *“Some facilitators of group process have a saying: ‘It begins before it begins.’ On a first level, this means that if the group starts at nine, it really starts as people gather in the room at 8:30. On a second level, it means that people bring their history of group interaction into the room with them and, to the degree it is possible, it must be taken into account as the process and conversation unfold. What is the readiness level of the people? Are they willing and open? Can they engage the people and the tasks?”* Advent serves, then, to ask us about our readiness, our willingness to hear afresh the message of God’s Word, God’s love spoken into flesh for us in the person and the work of Jesus Christ.

The role of the prophet is to speak a word to God’s people, as we heard from Isaiah.

Sometimes it is comfort, and other times it is warning. John the Baptist was the last in the long line of prophets, and his task was to be the forerunner of the Messiah. He offered people both a word of warning and a word of hope. He preached a “baptism of repentance” and told the people that they needed to turn around their lives. When Jesus appears, he comes preaching: “repent and believe the good news, the kingdom of God is at hand.”

Repentance is something that needs to be well begun — and if it is well begun, then we are well on our way to the goal of life in union with God. Repentance, we believe, is something we do from sin. Part of the problem with contemporary American culture — indeed, with mainline Christianity as a whole — is that we don’t think we need to repent because we don’t sin. Something else Shea said was: “*If sin is understood*

as any thought, deed, or disposition that breaks the flow of life between God and the self, as well as between the self, other people and the earth, then a different picture of the desire for forgiveness presents itself. Perhaps people wake up one day and find that there is no ‘life’ in their lives. The passion, pleasure, and purpose of what they do and who they are is no longer there. They go through the paces and fulfill their duties, but there is something wrong. Beneath the surface they are out of sync. Although they still fight for money and position, they know the payoff will not be all that it promises... Although they may not be able to list their sins, this is a sinful condition. The flow of life has dried up and they want out. It is often said that the longing for liberation begins when you notice you are in prison.”

Advent reminds us that we are to join in the preparation for the Lord’s coming afresh into

our lives, which includes our liberation and our incorporation into God's very life. For us to be well begun in our spiritual life means letting down the barriers we throw up and turning off the filters that keep us from hearing God's word of transforming love spoken to the ears of our hearts. John prepares the way, but it is Jesus who comes to us speaking the ultimate word of comfort and of hope. It is Jesus who demonstrates in his own life, death, and resurrection just how much God wants to share life with us.

In the midst of the worries of this time in our nation's history and in the crazed busyness that marks what we call "the holidays," take a moment and consider the word spoken to us through the prophets, through John and in Jesus. Hear a word of comfort that says what really matters isn't the perfect present, the party without a flaw, or anything

else, but the love of God in you and me — and that love extended to a world that is broken and needs to know that there is more than the material that matters.

"Well begun" is heeding this word and opening our lives to the One who is coming, and is already here. "Well begun" is, truly, half done when we come to the spiritual life. Today, as we come to receive the Eucharist, listen carefully to the words that are spoken, be a part of the action and, when the bread and cup come to you, receive them as one who is, in that action, received by God. Allow this small, ordinary act of eating and drinking to be what it truly is: the sign of something deeper, better, greater than it is. For in it, we are joined with the One who comes to us afresh again and again, speaking to us God's own word of comfort and of hope. "Well begun" begins here.

UNCOMFORTABLE GENEROSITY

(Mark 12:38-44)

THE REV. MOLLY F. JAMES, PhD
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Our daughter, Katherine, loves books. The other night, she picked a book called “December” for us to read. It wasn’t one I knew but it isn’t a book I will quickly forget. “December” tells the powerful story of a little homeless boy and his mother as they spend Christmas Eve in a cardboard box on the streets, huddled together under an old coat to keep warm. They have a “tree” (the discarded top of a tree) that is decorated, and two Christmas cookies (purchased by turning in 32 soda cans) that they are saving until tomorrow. And on the “wall” of their little house, there is a picture of an Angel (taken from a December calendar page, hence the name of the book). And

that is all they have. Just as the young boy is going to sleep dreaming of how delicious that single cookie will be tomorrow, there is a knock on their “door” — a piece of wood covering the opening in their cardboard hut. An old woman, standing there seeking shelter from the cold, asks to come in. They invite her in and share what they have. The mother gives the old coat for the woman to keep warm. Although he hesitates, the boy holds out the plate of Christmas cookies and the woman takes one, smiling in gratitude.

When the boy wakes up the next morning, the woman is gone and the coat is folded neatly on the floor. For the boy and his mother that night marked a transition. Over the coming months, his mother finds work, and by the next Christmas they are celebrating in the warmth of their own apartment.

That boy and his mother are a lot like the widow Jesus points out. They are generous, not because they have so much to give, but because they know that generosity is not about how much we give, but about HOW we give it. Jesus calls us to give — not as a way of showing the world how much we have, as many rich people do, but as a way of showing our true colors — showing that we are the good and loving people God created us to be.

It can be tempting to think that giving of our money or our time or our talents is just about giving from our surplus. It can be tempting to just give what we don't need. It is tempting because it is easy. If we only give what we won't miss, then how much does it matter? Many of us are well off, and so we know that the hundreds or thousands of dollars we give to the church, to charitable organizations, to

support those in need, makes a difference. But Jesus doesn't call us to live a life that is easy.

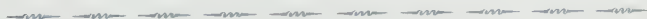
If it was only a matter of giving out of our abundance, there would be no story of the widow and her mite. But there is. Jesus holds her up as an example of what it means to be truly generous. It means to give in such a way that we feel the impact of our gift. No doubt that widow felt the impact of giving all the money she had. No doubt that little boy noticed that the next day he no longer had a Christmas cookie all to himself.

Jesus calls us to a life that is generous, generous like the boy in the story and like the widow. Jesus calls us to a life that is generous not just in the impact it has on others, but in its impact on us as well. We don't hear what happens to the widow after she leaves her coins at the temple. I like to think the ending of her

story is like the ending of the story of the little boy and his mother. They were generous, and their life began to turn around. Perhaps something similar happened for the widow. Perhaps she was reunited with family, or welcomed into a household, or able to find a job that turned her poverty around, too.

The fundamental lesson of "December" is that Jesus calls

us to live beyond our comfort zone. Following him, living a faithful life, is not meant to be easy. It is meant to make us uncomfortable. In giving more of ourselves, more of our treasure, than feels easy or comfortable, we open up space in our lives for God to do a new thing. It is how we grow. It is how we learn, and it is how we make room for the abundance of God's love to fill our lives.



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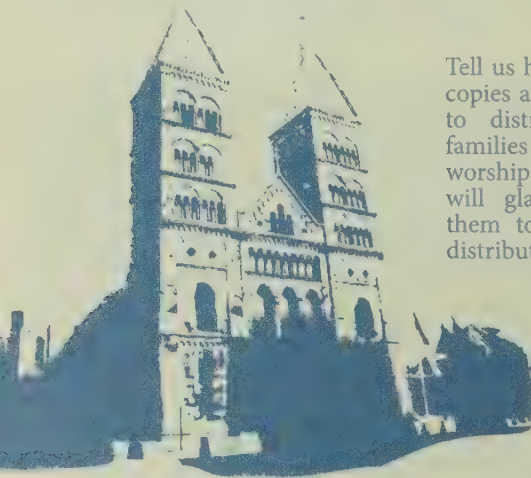
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BY THE REV. HUGH C. EDSALL

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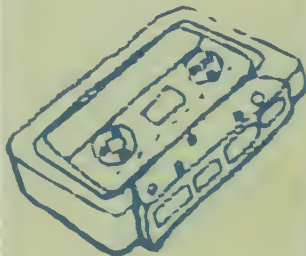
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CLOSING THE PATH TO MISERY

THE RT. REV. DANIEL H. MARTINS
BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF
SPRINGFIELD, IL

Bad things happen to people, and anyone involved in pastoral ministry is reminded of this on a regular basis. As I write, just within the last 48 hours, I've dealt with a suicide attempt, a diagnosis of Alzheimer's, and the beginning of hospice care for a man with cancer. This morning, I attended a regular meeting of clergy associated with our cathedral, and the rundown on pastoral care "situations" left me depressed. There's so much suffering, and there's rarely anything we can do about it. People are suffering nearby, and people are suffering far away. "In sorrow that an ancient curse should doom to death a universe..." — so begins the second stanza of

the venerable (and possibly my favorite) Advent hymn *Conditor alme siderum*.

Arguably the most well-known and best-loved of our Advent hymns is *Veni Emmanuel*, which has the advantage of being part of the canon of "carols" that are generally associated with Christmas in the popular imagination, so it's always a crowd-pleaser. Less well known is the fact that each verse began life as a Latin antiphon attached to the canticle *Magnificat* on the seven evenings preceding Christmas Eve. Only relatively recently have they been set to rhyme and meter in English and aggregated into a hymn.

The fifth verse, from the Latin antiphon *O clavis David* (O Key of David), speaks to the gloom of the human condition quite directly in its petition that "Emmanuel" come "and close the path to misery." (A more literal translation of

the Latin might be along the lines of “and block the hellish way.”) It is precisely what I wish for during any encounter, pastoral or personal, with someone who is suffering. It is what I wish for whenever I open a newspaper or click on the news page of my browser. I wish I could close the path to misery for anyone whom I love, or care about even a little bit, or—just about everybody. (There is perhaps a select short list I would have to work up some enthusiasm for, but that is itself a response to the misery they *cause*.) I wish I could close the path to everyone’s misery.

I can’t, of course. And, in an effective sense—it sounds slightly heretical to say this—God “can’t.” For God to simply intervene capriciously would violate the very structure of the created universe, not the least important element of which is human free will. But God is, nonetheless, in sorrow

about that ancient curse. And although it’s not part of the plan for him to intervene capriciously, he has done something much better; he has intervened gratuitously—that is, in a manner full of grace. The trajectory of redemption set in motion by the Incarnation, sealed in the Passion and Resurrection, and brought to fruition in the Ascension, means that the misery we encounter every day will be taken up into that gratuitous intervention and woven into a tapestry of healing and restoration that will, before the dust settles, send that ancient curse packing. And close the path to misery.

REJOICE, YOU BROOD OF VIPERS!

THE REV. M. DOW SANDERSON
RECTOR, THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY
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How many of you have had the experience of being a little bummed, a little down in the dumps, or perhaps downright *depressed*, and in the midst of such lovely misery encounter some cheerful soul who, with the best of intentions, suggests that you be *happy*!? But “happiness” on demand is a tall order. Joy in the midst of stress, sadness, depression, anxiety, grief, is difficult even to imagine.

Well, beloved, welcome to Advent!

Two Sundays ago, the Gospel reminded us that the world that we inhabit will come to a catastrophic end: *“There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and*

waves, men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world.”

Last Sunday, St. John the Baptist arrived, right on schedule, with his insistent demand that we “repent!”, that we make straight our crooked paths. And today, the same “voice crying in the wilderness” continues to assault our hearing — and this time, there is not even the slightest ambiguity: *“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee the wrath that is to come. Bear fruits that befit repentance!”*

So there you have it, my fellow vipers.

The world is in a mess, and we are largely — or perhaps it is at least more theologically accurate to say *entirely* — to blame! The world that God made and called “good” very often does not appear that way.

And yet, here we are on this third Sunday of Advent, with

pretty flowers on the altar, bedecked in Rose Vestments and, apart from this John the Baptist fellow, everyone else is demanding that we *rejoice!* St. Paul, Zephaniah, our chants, and our hymns, are all in a “*don’t worry, be happy*” sort of mood, and we vipers just want to find a dark rock to climb under...

What is it about this strange paradox that we call the Christian Faith?

In one of the contemporary films on the subject of Our Lord’s passion, there is a scene in the Garden of Gethsemane, when our Lord is in agony, and Satan, right on cue, shows up to make matters worse. And Jesus, as he contemplates the Cross, is shown by the evil one scenes of the world’s future. In a cheesy, 1940s newsreel sort of way, the future is depicted for Jesus, all in grainy black and white — bombs, and tanks, and concentration

camps, and dead soldiers in the trenches — and the clear message is: *You are going to do all this for them — but what difference will it make really?*

And it would be easy to make the Devil’s case. The evidence is rather substantial.

“And so this is Christmas, and what have you done? Another year over, and a new one just begun...”

The tree is decorated in many a home, and yet there is no real joy. People around the world hurry and push to buy and spend, and yet the hungry and homeless are all around us. The wrapped presents for a beloved teacher are tenderly placed on her desk, even as an insane intruder begins to shoot and kill. And there is no peace on earth, goodwill among men.

How can we rejoice in the midst of all this turmoil in the

world? And how can we rejoice in the midst of our own complexities, contradictions, and paradoxes?

Rejoice, you brood of vipers!

Well, at least St. John the Baptist knew where to begin.

We are rather good at *general* confession. We are fairly unanimous about generic love. It is the *specificity* that gives us difficulty. We are happier to love our neighbor as ourselves at something of a distance.

But the reason — indeed the only reason that it is not insane to suggest that rejoicing is in order in this broken, troubled, and fallen world — is that God has not only created it, but he has entered it, and has redeemed it, and continues to redeem it.

The repentance that St. John the Baptist demands is nev-

er a first move, but always a grateful response to a gracious God who has given to us even his last drop of very human blood.

To the hungry, he comes as a fellow beggar. To the homeless, he comes as one who has no place to lay his head. To those families and communities disrupted by strife and disagreement, he comes as one reviled and ridiculed. To those who, when all around are cheery and bright, have yet age and illness as their constant companions, he comes as one well acquainted with human frailty. To those parents in Connecticut, who had to face the unspeakable terror of burying such very small children, even as presents were under the tree, he came as one who has tasted death and transcended it.

For in Herod's wrath, he himself was nearly among those holy innocents for whom Ra-

chel still weeps. And he comes
this day to comfort all who
grieve the loss of innocent life,
and to welcome the Holy In-
nocents into the Glory of his
Presence.

The Lord is with us.

The Word was made flesh.

Death is conquered.

Sin is forgiven.

Tears are dried.

There is a place where sorrow
and pain are no more.

It is for this reason, and this
reason alone, that in spite of
the worst things this world
can offer, we can — indeed we
shall — rejoice.

EMBRACING HOPE

THE REV. GAVIN G. DUNBAR
RECTOR, ST. JOHN'S CHURCH,
SAVANNAH, GA

Advent is a season of hope,
of hope for redemption. But
how to do embrace this hope?
How do we make it ours? In
repentance, in faith, in love.

Lectionary lessons (Romans
15:4-13; Luke 21:25-32) teach
us that the Advent hope is not
established in this world with
its pomp and glory, its power
and wisdom. To the contrary,
our hope comes in the pass-
ing away of this world. "There
shall be signs in the sun, and
in the moon, and in the stars;
and upon the earth distress
of nations, with perplexity;
the sea and the waves roar-
ing; men's hearts failing them
for fear, and for looking after
those things which are com-
ing on the earth: for the pow-
ers of heaven shall be shaken."
It is then — then, as the world
passes away, and our worldly

hopes with it — precisely then, emphatically then! — “then lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh.” It is as our worldly hopes die that the true hope is born. And so it proves on Christmas, for our redemption comes not in worldly power, but in the weakness of a newborn child and the poverty of a stable.

It is not in the world that the hope of Advent is established, nor in this world’s wisdom that we learn it; but rather in the wisdom of God, the wisdom set forth in his word: “heaven and earth shall pass away” — that is, the visible frame of this world — “but my words shall not pass away”. It is through “patience and comfort of the Scriptures” the Apostle says, that we have hope. And so it proves on Christmas, when the angel of the Lord first published the gospel, and the shepherds believing, obeying the word of God, seek, find, recognize, and adore the Sav-

ior. This Advent may we also hear and receive the word of the gospel in faith, and receive in the child of Bethlehem the comfort of a salvation that endures when everything else has passed away.

The Advent hope is established, not in this passing world, but in the Word of God that does not pass away; yet it is a hope for all the world – not just Israel, but also the Gentile nations; not just the Church, but for all the elect people of God scattered abroad in the world who have yet to hear the gospel. “There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust”. The Church therefore is not just for insiders, but for outsiders; not just for people like us, but for people not like us. It is a catholic body, embracing “all sorts and conditions of men”, united in one hope in the faith of God’s word and in mutual love. “Where-

fore receive ye one another, as Christ Jesus hath received us, to the glory of God". And so it proves on Christmas, when the manger at Bethlehem is adored by Jewish shepherds and Gentile wise men, people from near and people from far, "high and low, rich and poor, one with another". This Advent, may he teach all those who worship at his manger to love one another in the unity of his body.

Something to repent of — our pride in worldly wisdom, power, and pomp; something to hear and believe — the word of the truth of the gospel; and something to do — receive one another in love. Thus do we embrace the hope of Christ's Advent. May he give us grace to do so.

*O dying souls,
behold
your
living spring;
O dazzled eyes,
behold
your
sun of grace;
Dull ears, attend
what word
this Word
doth bring;
Up, heavy
hearts,
with joy
your joy
embrace.
From death,
from dark,
from deafness,
from despairs,
This life,
this light,
this Word,
this joy repairs.*

Robert Southwell

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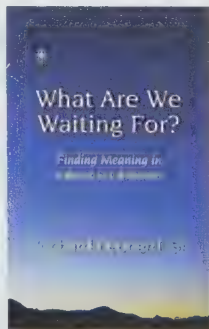
dysfunctional, hurtful, restrictive behavior in favor of liberating self-concepts and belief systems. It provides solutions for communicating and problem-solving more effectively, allowing each partner in the relationship to experience more emotional intimacy, joy, and sexual pleasure. The book provides relationship information, practical tools, and inspirational, real-life stories. It also offers a banquet of spiritual practices for couples of all faiths or none to bring these new models into focused action.

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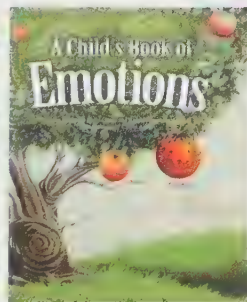
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WHO WILL YOU GIVE YOUR SNEAKERS TO?

BRENDA DINGWALL

When my children were young, our local faith community began a ministry to the homeless. In an effort to keep folks out of the cold of winter, the downtown churches took turns offering dinner, shelter, and breakfast to the homeless population. Each church took one week between November and March. I eagerly signed up to help serve a dinner, and planned to bring my two children, then ages 3 and 6, to help serve. I left work early and headed to pick up the kids in hopes of feeding them early before going to the church. When I entered the day care center, 3-year-old Alex ran to me positively beaming. 'I did it mom! I stayed down for my whole nap!!!!!!' It was at this moment that I realized my

plans for an orderly evening were shot.

For the previous two weeks, I had tried every trick in the book to get Alex to cooperate with the center-mandated nap-time. Finally, in desperation, I resorted to the time-tested parenting method: bribery. I promised Alex that if he stayed on his mat for the whole nap time, I would buy him some much-coveted green Power Ranger sneakers. We left the daycare center and raced to Walmart to collect Alex's booty. They had blue Power Ranger sneakers, red ones, pink ones, yellow ones, but no green. Off to Kmart we went. Same story there. Finally, after two Walmarts and two K-marts, we found the precious green Power Ranger sneakers.

We raced to the church and arrived just in time to throw the spaghetti sauce in the pan. As I made the sauce, Alex

showed the entire kitchen and serving crew his incredibly cool new sneakers. When the time came, Alex and Nick played in the far corner of the kitchen, while the other adults and I served the meal. I was prepared for the typical addicted, disabled, and mentally ill people we picture when we think of the homeless population, but I was absolutely unprepared for the number of families with children that had come for food and shelter.

One woman in particular stood out. She and her young son looked neat, clean, and absolutely terrified. I asked one of the professionals who administered the program about her. He told me that she had escaped an incredibly abusive situation with only the clothes on her back. All of the women's shelters were full, so they had sent her to us, because they knew that at least she and her son would be warm and safe.

When the woman arrived at the food window, she asked for only one plate, explaining that her son was too terrified to eat. I asked if she thought he would eat if he was allowed to come in the kitchen and have peanut butter and jelly with my children. She said she didn't know, but since he hadn't eaten in two days, it might be worth a try. I took the little boy by the hand and led him into the kitchen. I introduced Darius to Nick and Alex, and gave each of them a plate of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Thrilled to be around people his own size, Darius soon began to eat. While he was eating, he noticed Alex's sneakers. He pointed his finger in awe at the green Power Ranger. After every bite, he would touch Alex's sneaker. While they were eating, Alex said, "maybe your mom can get you some green Power Ranger sneakers too!" The little boy just looked down.

After dinner, Darius returned to his mom, and the kitchen crew set to cleaning up. As I cleaned, Alex chatted away. "He really liked my sneakers, I hope his mom buys him some!" I explained that that wasn't too likely since he and his mom didn't have any money. They didn't even have a home. Alex just said, "Oh" and wandered off to play. As we were getting ready to leave, Alex looked up at me and said, "Mom, if I give Darius my sneakers, will you carry me to the car?" Stunned, I said, "Of course, are you sure you want to do this?" He said, "Yeah, I have lots of stuff, he doesn't even have a house. I think Jesus would want me to give him my shoes." He took off his shoes, and skipped over and gave them to Darius. As he did, I looked around the kitchen. There was not a dry eye in the house.

The next day, I went back to the church. I had brought a

coat and some things Alex had outgrown for Darius. When I looked around the hall, they weren't there. I asked the coordinator about them and he smiled and said, "It's all your son's fault. After y'all left last night, the rest of the kitchen crew asked me to check out her story. I did, and she's 100% legit. Apparently, he threatened the child with a gun. She picked up her son, ran out, and never looked back. This morning, Peter, last night's dessert man, phoned to say that he would like to offer her an apartment in one of his buildings rent-free for six months; he figured that would be enough time for her to get on her feet." As soon as I hung up the phone from him, Anne called. She had a job for her. I hung up from her, and Nelson called wanting to know if it would it help if he provided a scholarship for Darius to attend our church-sponsored downtown daycare center for a while.

When I phoned the agency that sent her to us last night, they were so excited! Peter phoned about an hour ago, and said she had just picked up the keys to her apartment. Word has it she was so overwhelmed, she hasn't stopped crying yet. Imagine that — all that because of a pair of sneakers.”

I cried all the way home. My tiny son had generously given away his most precious treasure to comfort a stranger. His simple act of unselfishness had shown us all what it means to live faithfully and compassionately. His small act had so filled the hearts of

others, it caused them to act unselfishly and generously. Their compassion and generosity helped a complete stranger to feel the loving embrace of Christ when she most needed it. This is the heart of what generosity is all about. It is about joyfully giving what is most precious to you so that others may feel the loving embrace of God. It's about giving your really cool sneakers away to a child you never met before and will never meet again because you want him to feel loved. It's about daring to live your faith.

Who will you give your sneakers to?

GENEROSITY

BY JOSEPH M. RAWLS

The generous Creator exploded the universe into being,
and held it in divine energy while flesh evolved;
The generous Word united in love with flesh and died for it;
The generous Spirit resurrected divine-human flesh.
This foreshadows our fate: union with the Source of all
generosity, if we but accept and return it.

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THE BOTTLE CAPS MAN

THE REV. MATT MARINO
CANON OF YOUTH AND YOUNG
ADULTS, DIOCESE OF ARIZONA

Growing up, there was an old man who used to ask us kids the same question every day. We had no idea what he was talking about. More than four decades have passed, but when the crowd from the old neighborhood gets together, someone will always ask, *“How empty are your pockets and how full is your heart?”*

In central Phoenix in the early 1970s, the most coveted thing in our kid world was Bottle Caps – the brand-new candy that looked like the metal top on a bottle of pop and tasted like the soda inside. Back then, Bottle Caps came in flat foil pouches. They were larger, harder, and with nifty ridges that allowed them to hang on

the end of your tongue when you stuck it out at the other kids on the bus.

Bottle Caps were an early lesson in the economics of supply and demand – the only place you could get them was from the ice cream truck, a large white panel van with giant decals of frozen products on the sides. The truck would drive through the streets playing music over a loudspeaker mounted to the roof, a Pavlovian cue for kids to grab their nickels and dimes to buy Popsicles and ice cream cones and most everything else moms claimed would “spoil supper.”

The first time I heard the notes of the ice cream truck’s carnival music in the distance, I didn’t know what it was. I was playing Kick the Can with the big kids when suddenly the shrubbery began to rustle. All over the street kids emerged from hiding shouting, “Run!

We have to get there first!" I ran as hard as I could to keep up with the bigger kids.

We weren't first though. An old man was already in line. Kids were positively downcast as they watched the man buy every single pack of Bottle Caps in the ice cream truck and stuff them into his bulging pockets. Kids began to shout, "No fair!" "You can't buy them all!"

He wore an old cardigan sweater and corduroy pants and had the most piercing blue eyes. He turned those piercing eyes on us and in a faint Southern accent asked, "So you are upset that I have all the Bottle Caps?"

"Yeah!" Kids shouted in outrage.

"I suppose you want some of these?" He questioned, patting his bulging pockets.

"Yes!" I shouted, reaching over Mark Hickens in front of me.

He bent his head around Mark and looked down upon me. "You are very young. Do you even know what Bottle Caps are?"

"Not really." I admitted.

He smiled and I couldn't help but like the way his eyes lit up. "Bottle Caps," He began, "are the tastiest candy ever invented. Eating them is like being able to *chew* on soda pop. Bottle Caps make you smile a smile that starts deep inside your tummy and goes from the inside out. How would you like to eat a candy like *that*?"

My eyes became wide. "Would I? You bet I would!"

The man pressed, "What would you say, young man, if I gave you a pack?"

Johnny Dodson said, "Aww, he doesn't have any money. He's too little." My head dropped in shame. The man lifted my chin and his piercing eyes held my mine. "I didn't say *anything* about money. I said, 'gave,'" he continued.

"FREE? Nobody gives away BOTTLE CAPS!" yelled Johnny's indignant older brother.

"Well now, I didn't say 'free' exactly either." The old man moved his gaze to the group.

Now 10 kids were indignant, "What are you talking about Mister?"

"Suppose I gave you two packs of Bottle Caps," the man said turning back to me. "Would you promise to only eat one and give the other away to someone else?" I was very confused.

He repeated the offer, "If I give you two packs of Bottle

Caps, will you promise me that you will eat one and share one with someone else?"

I nodded seriously, "Yes."

The man held up two green envelopes full of Bottle Caps, one in each hand. I grabbed them and wheeled to leave before he could catch me. "Remember," he yelled after me. "One for you. One for someone else."

He then turned to the crowd of kids, reached into his pockets fat with Bottle Caps and said, "Who else will promise to share a pack for a pack of their own?"

Every hand shot up. By the time we left, the man's pockets were empty.

The very next day, we heard music and jumped on our bikes. When we got to the truck, that old man was at the

front of the line again stuffing his pockets with all of the Bottle Caps. He saw me and said, "Hello son. Tell me who did you give your other pack too?"

"My little brother," I said. "He was *really* happy."

"And how did that make you feel?" He asked.

"It was almost as fun as eating my own, Mr. Bottle Caps Man!" I replied, giving him a name that would stick.

He seemed amused by this new moniker, and said, "That's what I thought." Then he looked around. "So, who can tell me about the person you gave your Bottle Caps to? If you tell me a story I will give you two more packs of this dee-licious candy", he said, his drawling reminding me how much like pop, which was just short of a forbidden substance in our house, they tasted. And

again, the man went home without a single package of Bottle Caps for himself.

Every morning that summer, the same thing happened. When we heard the music in the distance, we jumped on our bikes and tore through the neighborhood to beat the Bottle Caps Man to the ice cream truck. And every day the old man with the twinkling eyes would be standing at the front of the line stuffing his pockets with the truck's entire stock of Bottle Caps.

Each day, as we finished our melting popsicles, the Bottle Caps Man would listen to our stories and place two packs of Bottle Caps in each of our hands to share with others. And most days the Bottle Caps Man went home with empty pockets.

Well, as all kids do, we grew up and the Bottle Caps Man aged as well. He became a

little slower. His shoulders stooped. He began to use a cane. But somehow, he still beat the kids to the ice cream truck. One Saturday, though, after I was far too old for ice cream trucks, the kids arrived and the Bottle Caps Man wasn't there. It was the ice cream truck driver who told the kids that the Bottle Caps Man had died. You've never seen quite so many young people at an octogenarian's funeral.

At the funeral, much to our surprise, the ice cream truck driver stood up and gave the eulogy. That was how we discovered the secret to the Bottle Caps Man beating us to the ice cream truck all those years – the ice cream truck driver was the Bottle Caps Man's son. The Bottle Caps Man had an inside line on the route! The son told us that in his early years, Bottle Caps sales kept his ice cream truck in business. When business picked

up, he told his dad that he didn't need him to keep buying a case of Bottle Caps every day. His father told him, "I don't just do it for you. I do it for the kids." The ice cream truck driver said, "My dad gave away a fortune in Bottle Caps, one pocket full at a time." And as he said it, tears filled his eyes...and ours too.

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*How empty are your pockets
and how full is your heart?*

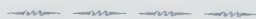
The bottle Caps Man taught us that empty pockets can bring smiles. And he didn't just teach the kids. Parents couldn't help but smile too when they saw us sharing with each other...and, occasionally, with them.

And as I age, I wonder what kind of old man I will be. Will I be a man, like other old men, who sits in my house counting and recounting a carefully hoarded collection of my favorite "candy"...a collection that is neither useful for others nor joy producing for myself? Or will I live generously?

What we did not know was that the Bottle Caps Man was teaching us about grace — that we drink from cisterns we did not dig (Deut 6:11), in a land given rather than toiled for (Joshua 24:13). We have been invited to drink from

the spring of the water of life without cost (Rev. 21:6), receive an inheritance we did nothing to create (Heb 9:15), and enjoy a salvation purchased at another's expense (1 Pet 3:18). We are, in every way possible, recipients of grace. Grace is an inexhaustible supply of the goodness of our God, a spigot that can only be turned off by refusing to let it run out on others. It is a sweet gift that makes us smile a smile that starts from deep inside our tummies. There is abundance in the hands of the great Bottle Caps Man of our souls. Will you share it?

And, since they really are connected, I must ask you:
*How empty are your pockets
and how full is your heart?*



CHRISTMAS MELTDOWN

THE REV. EVAN D. GARNER
RECTOR, ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL
CHURCH, DECATUR, AL

Friday afternoons can be difficult in our house. Although it sounds ridiculous, our children are exhausted after a long week of preschool and kindergarten, and by 5:00, the littlest thing can send them into a tantrum. Truth be told, the same fatigue has taken hold of their parents who, at the end of the school week, have little patience for their whining and bickering. About a year ago, when we first noticed the phenomenon, we labeled it “Fussy Friday,” and now all it takes is a knowing look from Elizabeth or me to remind the other why we are dealing with a house full of cranky people.

This past Friday was no exception — actually perhaps worse than usual, after a week

filled with school Christmas parties and programs. By spending the afternoon out with friends, I avoided several hours of drama, but, when I got home, there was still plenty waiting for me. While Elizabeth finished preparing supper, I began setting up our Christmas tree, inviting the children to help. Taking turns is never easy, but on Fussy Friday it is virtually impossible. Soon, one child was screaming at the other, and what was supposed to be a jolly family moment quickly devolved into a full-fledged screaming fit. “THAT’S IT!” I yelled. “GO UPSTAIRS TO YOUR ROOM!” It would not be the last time that I lost my cool.

During the thirty-minute “time-out,” I managed to get the tree upright and more-or-less straight, so, when the excluded child returned downstairs and discovered that most of the work had already been finished, another melt-

down ensued—complete with feet-stomping and head-shaking: “I’ll NEVER get to help out with Christmas!” Without hesitation, I pointed up at the ceiling and said, “Back upstairs for another thirty minutes! And maybe this time you’ll think about how you’re supposed to behave.” Halfway through the half-hour, I relented and went upstairs to seek a *détente*. We both agreed that some quiet time on the couch or playing in the playroom would help avoid another blowup, so we headed towards our respective sides of the downstairs. The peace was not long-lasting.

Soon, the child asked, “Where’s the baby Jesus?” holding the Fisher-Price Joseph and Mary in each hand. “In a drawer,” I replied. “But I want to play with the manger scene,” was the passionate plea. “You can, but not with the baby Jesus. Baby Jesus isn’t born until Christmas.” We

bickered back and forth for a little while, and our voices got louder and louder until finally, when the reality that I was not going to give in and produce the still-hidden plastic Jesus figurine set in, the child screamed, “WE CAN’T WAIT UNTIL CHRISTMAS! WE’LL BE TOO BUSY THEN—TOO BUSY OPENING PRESENTS! WE’LL BE SO BUSY THAT WE’LL FORGET ABOUT JESUS!”

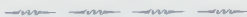
I should have stopped then and there and sat down with my child for a quiet explanation about the real meaning of Christmas, but I didn’t. Everything I fear about the holidays—that the steady creep of secularism is squeezing the birth of Jesus out of Christmas—had come to life in my own house. So I screamed back, “THAT’S THE WHOLE POINT! WHY DO YOU THINK WE HAVE ADVENT? WHAT DO YOU THINK WE’RE GETTING

READY FOR? YOU CAN'T BE TOO BUSY FOR JESUS AT CHRISTMAS!" And I threw up my hands and walked away for my own thirty-minute time-out.

Of course, it isn't my child's fault. And it certainly isn't the schools' fault or the government's fault. It's not even the fault of merchants, marketers, or magazines, convincing my children that the only important thing about December is picking out the best toy. It's not your fault or mine either. The world is just too busy for Christmas. We don't have time to wait until December 24 to celebrate the birth of our Savior. That takes too long. We need to get in the Christmas spirit right now so that we can move on to New Year's before it's too late even for that.

Today is Christmas Eve. Stop whatever you're doing. All of it can wait. Nothing is as important as coming together as

the family of God to celebrate the birth of our Savior. Don't let the busy-ness of getting ready for Christmas squeeze Christmas out of your life. Tonight we gather to hear the story of the shepherds and angels and to remember a family huddled together in a barn. On this holy night, everything else stops so that we can journey to Bethlehem to behold the infant Messiah. This is what we have been waiting for. Come and see the newborn king.



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WHEN GOD GETS REAL

THE REV. SCOTT GUNN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FORWARD MOVEMENT, CINCINNATI, OH

One way to understand Christmas is to think of it as a celebration of God getting real. God is real from before the creation. But for a few one-on-one encounters, the Divine was an abstraction. Moses might have glimpsed God but, for most, an encounter with the Holy was wholly other.

Enter on stage the Holy Family. With Jesus, God gets real, sharing our human nature. The chasm between God and humanity, if it ever existed, is crossed. Mary, Joseph, and sundry characters gather in an ordinary place to experience an ordinary birth. Jesus, God-with-us, comes into this world in the most ordinary, messy, vulnerable way possible. God gets real.

It's easy for Christians to agree about abstractions. "Change is good," we say, until something we care about has to go away. "Care for the poor," is a lovely sentiment until that person is standing in front of you demanding attention or money. "The church is for everyone" is an attractive bumper sticker, but it's messy in practice.

We can't really celebrate Christmas unless we're ready to dive into the ordinary, messy, very non-abstract reality of the Incarnation. By God's dwelling among us, human nature has been sanctified. That business we mutter about seeking and serving Christ in all persons isn't just an abstraction. I'd like to offer two examples that we can all practice.

Those of us who hang out in churches get a chance to see how well we celebrate the Incarnation when Christmas Eve comes around. Pro tip:

there are no bonus points for lovely poinsettias, beautiful choirs, flawless chant, cute pageants, or heart-warming rituals with candles. No, I think all those things are fantastic, but they are the proverbial icing on the Incarnational cake. The cake is that ordinary, beautiful, messy, difficult, holy thing at the core of our celebration. Incarnation. God-with-us.

On Christmas Eve, our churches will fill. How will we welcome those who show up for worship? How will we greet those who come seeking a word of hope, listening for the glad sounds of the angels? For the love of God, literally, I hope there will be no murmuring about “Christmas-and-Easter people” or “sitting in my pew” and so forth.

As I wrote in *Forward Day by Day* one Christmas Eve, referencing Galatians 3:28:

“Many of us will go to church this evening for Christmas Eve. And there we will experience another great divide, at least in our churches. I think Saint Paul would remind us that both lifelong members and first-time or seasonal attendees are one in Christ. The latter are not guests in our church, but rather we are all one as we celebrate Christ’s birth. Maybe if the person who has come to church with great trepidation receives the same welcome as the lifelong member, some grace will happen all around. And that would be a profound Christmas gift for everyone.”

We are all guests, together, at Christ’s table. The person who has come to church for reasons they can’t quite articulate, perhaps for the first time, has the same claim on Christmas that I do. In fact, theirs might be more admirable, because it is borne on faith and hope, not habit and familiarity.

And then what about outside the church? Or maybe in the narthex? If you worship in an urban church like I do, it's quite possible someone will show up not to make an offering, but to seek an offering. How can we shoo this person away as we sing nativity carols? You can't post a guard to keep out the riffraff when we have gathered to worship the Incarnate Jesus Christ, fully divine and fully riffraff.

Holiness is rarely neat, tidy, and predictable. We should know that from our celebrations of the Incarnation. If we peel away the sentimental, familiar layers of the story, holiness is messy, incarnation is messy. The Christian life well lived is messy. And God is right there. O come, let us adore him.

A version of this essay first appeared on the author's blog at www.sevenwholedays.org.

THE THORN THAT BLOOMS AT CHRISTMAS

THE REV. DR. LEANDER S. HARDING
RECTOR, ST. LUKE'S EPISCOPAL
CHURCH, CATSKILL, NY

I would like to tell you a story. This story is not from Scripture but from the folkways of our Anglican Tradition. It is one of those stories that are impossible to verify. It is not, as they say, one of those things necessary to salvation. But it is a story that has warmed the hearts of the faithful for generations. It is a story about someone you would not ordinarily associate with Christmas: St. Joseph of Arimathea who donated the expensive garden tomb in which the body of Jesus was laid after being taken down from the cross.

St. Joseph was, according to tradition, a wealthy man and a trader. Some ancient author-

ities believe he was related to Jesus, perhaps his uncle.

There is a charming English legend, quite unverifiable but stoutly believed in Cornwall, that Joseph of Arimathea was involved in the tin trade and sent ships to the tin mines in Cornwall. (Britain was then at the edge of the Roman Empire and represented one of the boundaries of the known world.) The story goes that St. Joseph sent the boy Jesus on one of his ships to visit England and that the young Jesus walked upon the fields of Cornwall. There is even a hymn about all of this in the English Hymnal, "And did those feet tread upon that green and pleasant land."

During the life of Jesus, we catch glimpses of Joseph of Arimathea in the Gospels. He appears to be like Nicodemus, one of a small number of the Pharisees and the ruling body of the Sanhedrin who sympa-

thized with Jesus and came in secret to hear him. We know Joseph must have been present at the trial of Jesus and, out of fear for his own safety, did not intervene on behalf of Jesus.

He seems to have come to himself after the Crucifixion, and to have come forward boldly to claim the body of Jesus from Pilate. He then has the body of Christ laid in his own expensive tomb and arranges for half a hundred-weight of expensive spices for the funeral.

But the story I want to tell you tonight comes many years later. Joseph of Arimathea has become a witness to the Resurrection and a great missionary. Finally, near the end of his life and weary from his great travels on behalf of the Gospel, he decides to take the Gospel to the ends of the Earth—to Britain. He travels to a place called Glastonbury.

The legend says that when he got off the boat he was so weary that he planted his staff into the ground in order to be able to rest his whole weight upon it. The staff rooted to the spot and burst into flower. This plant blooms each year at Christmas time. It is called the Glastonbury Thorn. This much of the story is certain: There is such a plant in Glastonbury, especially on the grounds of the Cathedral there. The plant is something like a Hawthorn, and it does flower each year around Christmas. In the seventeenth century, the troops of Oliver Cromwell, in a fit of Puritan zeal, tried to cut down the Glastonbury Thorn. The effect was to spread it around. The plant survives and thrives to this day.

I like this story about Joseph of Arimathea. It is comforting. Christmas is more complicated than the simple cheer of the greeting cards. The Jo-

seph who goes to claim the body of the Lord from Pilate is a man full of grief and guilt over lost opportunities. Many of us, I think, come to Christmas this way, with some guilt about what we have let pass us by and some guilt about what is gone and cannot be gotten back. We have guilt about the time we should have spent with spouse or children, with parents or siblings or friends.

Now we are separated by distance or death, and we miss our missed chances. Or perhaps it is some part of ourselves that we miss, something that was so alive once upon a Christmas-time and which has become lost and inaccessible. We are looking for something inside and we cannot find it. Even for children there is sometimes sadness and weariness mixed in with the genuine joy and celebration of Christmas. The heart, after all, can carry more than one tune at a time, and they

are not necessarily in the same mood.

I, at any rate, identify with Joseph of Arimathea, and perhaps at least some of you here tonight do as well. But the story goes on. This man, wearied by the secret weight of his guilt and grief, this man who both cares and is care worn, becomes a witness to the new life whose birthday is tonight.

Into the hands of such a one as this (and the Saints in their beginnings are never particularly admirable or heroic—they get changed—that's the whole point), into the hands of such a one as this, God places the precious blood of his love poured out for the life of the world. This person, who has been wearied with grief and guilt, becomes weary spreading the good news of God's life-giving love which has been born into our midst this night. From the hands of such a one as this, new life flowers

forth, life which cannot for long be cut back, but which blossoms again and again.

At communion we each make a journey down this road to Bethlehem where we receive the Word of God's love made flesh. As he did with St. Joseph of Arimathea, God will place in our hands his broken body and entrust to us his precious blood. We, perhaps touched by sadness and regret, will carry the secret treasure of God's healing love that has overcome even death and the grave.

Do not be surprised if under your hand in the midst of life's care, at the limit of your strength, something unexpectedly flowers forth. It will not be the first time, nor the last. It has happened before. It will happen again. Have faith in Christmas. Put your whole weight upon it. Amen.

KEEPING CHRISTMAS JOYFULLY

THE VERY REV. ANTHONY F.M.
CLAVIER
DIOCESE OF SPRINGFIELD

At this time of the year, expectation is very nearly overcome by exhaustion. Whether that expectation is Christmas dinner and a pile of ill-afforded presents, or the coming of the Son of Man, the lead-up now seems interminable, like an overlong engagement, and pressure to do the right thing by the right people seems overwhelming.

The Christmas tree, which somehow wandered into the living room before Thanksgiving, looks a bit shabby now — or if it is artificial, it probably needs dusting. Perhaps the dog tore into one of the packages. There's still last-minute shopping to be done, a turkey to be bought — is Thanksgiving now like Christmas, or Christmas like Thanksgiving?

— and we still haven't decided whether to invite old Uncle Harry over and endure his endless war stories.

The gospel today reminds us of another person whose anticipation may have been exhausting. Joseph is informed by God's messenger that his young fiancé is going to have a baby, and he is ordered to keep quiet. He isn't the father, Matthew implies. Perhaps we are a bit more used to such a situation today, and we may commend Joe for sticking with Mary despite her questionable morality. But after all, morality is subjective, isn't it?

A first-century Jew thought otherwise. And quite apart from the moral issue, a matter of the Law, Joseph was faced with the practical matter of just how one hides a pregnancy, a teenage pregnancy probably. And then there was the matter of Joseph's own feelings. It looks as if the pregnan-

cy occurred after he became engaged to Mary. How could she do such a thing? And if the messenger was right, and he wasn't dreaming dreams, the child to be born had Yahweh, the God of Israel, as its father. What on earth would such a child be like, look like, act like?

How do we, like Joseph, do right by Mary and the child she gives to us? For we, too, can react from the ground of the secular world in which we live. We can be equally cynical about what God was doing through Mary. Our feelings, our self-absorption may intrude. The demands of faith may be just too much, an optional extra for which we have no time, and an investment of faith and action that has no room in our cluttered, busy lives. Regarding Christmas as a story helps us push it to one side, to be picked up or laid aside as time permits.

Yet the faithful Joseph was a Jew. He believed in a God who acted first and required a human response of obedience and awe, not a God who waited around for human suggestions or obeyed human laws like the law of nature. This God didn't think much of those who thought that God was bound by what humans conceived as unbreakable laws. The God of Abraham did as He thought fit.

While we rush around creating Christmas and getting it all wrong, Joseph walked in faith, expecting God to get it right, to shield Mary from the censure of prying eyes, to heal his feelings of bewilderment, and to ensure that the child born, while truly God, was winsomely and engagingly human. Humble Joseph calls us to that very same faith and commitment.

The problem for Joseph, and perhaps for us, is that he ex-

pected God to act in power and might as God did on Sinai after he brought Israel out of Egypt, as God intervened to rescue Israel. This time, there seemed to be a difference: God was intervening in vulnerability and weakness in the form of a baby. Such a version of God isn't much to our liking. We like a bit of force from God, and we like a bit of muscle when we think we are representing God. We just can't get our minds around the notion of loving-in-weakness being the solution. Joseph probably wanted to lock Mary in her room, subject her to hours of criticism and then, once the baby arrived, divorce her. He didn't. He looked after her, loved her, and struggled down that road from Nazareth to Bethlehem with her.

Once the child is born and reaches maturity Joseph just fades away and is mentioned no more. If Mary is extraordinarily faithful in accepting

God's calling to be Mother of the Eternal King, the Messiah, Joseph shares in that faithfulness to a remarkable degree, albeit in his own way.

It is not too late to get Christmas right this year, to stop, reflect, realize that you may have done many things since Thanksgiving, but those things aren't Christmas. This year, perhaps in the next few days, you can stop thinking that all depends on your presents and your cooking. It all depends on God's giving.

Like Joseph, you may expect, but not control. And when God acts by dwelling among us and taking our humanity into himself, then keep Christmas joyfully during the twelve days, give a present a day, stretch out the feast, and give thanks that we are saved in and through the child.

SEEING MARY

KELLY GREY CARLISLE, PH.D.
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, TRINITY
UNIVERSITY, SAN ANTONIO, TX

My church's parking lot is next to the Greyhound station in downtown San Antonio. On my way in to choir tonight, a woman stopped me. She was young, a little straggly, but clean. Her pregnant belly pooched out a little, the way pregnant bellies do on thin people, cute as a button. The kind of pregnant belly you'd want to touch.

She was short \$8 for a bus ticket to Austin. Greyhound wouldn't cut her a deal. She and her husband needed to get to Austin. I'd watched her ask a couple of other people in the dark parking lot, but they said no. "How much does the ticket cost?" I asked.

She and her husband called ahead and they said it was \$20

each, but now they were told \$28. They only needed \$8.

"I don't have any cash," I said, which was the truth, but I had a credit card. "I'll come pay for your ticket."

"And we can give you the rest of the money back!" she said.

"I'm so sorry to bug you. I'm sorry to take up your time. My husband didn't even want me to ask nobody."

"It's okay. When are you due?" I tried to change the subject. I didn't want her to be embarrassed. "I have two more months to go."

We turned the corner. "My husband's round front," she said. There were lots of people there. A lot of them were asking for money.

"Miss, Miss," a man wrapped in a thick parka, in spite of the warm night, called to me.

"Miss, don't listen to her."

"I don't see my husband," the young woman said. "Have you seen a man in a white sweater?" she asked the crowd.

No one had.

"Let's go into the station and look," I offered. "I can buy your ticket. We don't need him for that."

"But then I can't give you the money."

"It's okay."

"Well, my ticket's attached to his. He has to be here."

It was crowded in the station, people going all sorts of places, but mostly now just waiting, pacing. I used to fit in at Greyhound stations; I don't anymore.

Her husband wasn't there.

"Ma'am, I don't want to keep you. I don't want to waste your time."

"It's okay."

Then another woman came up to the pregnant woman. "Here's your eight bucks, honey. I found some for you."

"Thank you," she said, taking it, then holding it tightly in her fist.

"You're welcome, honey." The other woman left. "So, you all set?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Merry Christmas. Good luck." I touched her shoulder and left. A man stopped me on my way out of the station.

"I hope you didn't give her any money. She's a professional con woman."

"I didn't," I said.

"Good!"

Here's the thing, though. I would have bought her that ticket, even if she were a professional con woman, which she may or may not have been. If I'd had cash, I would have given it to her.

I didn't see that pregnant woman tonight, the woman who said she wanted to go to Austin. I saw my own mom, thirty-seven years ago, seven months pregnant with me, and just as desperate, if not more so. My father had just been put in jail. She lived in a motel. She would have lied for money; she would have done anything for us. After I was born, she turned tricks to keep us alive. That's what she was doing when she was murdered, three weeks after I was born. That woman outside the Greyhound station was my mom. That cute little baby bump was me. I don't care if she was lying or not.

I didn't see that pregnant woman tonight, the woman who said she wanted to go to Austin. I saw a pregnant girl from 2,000 years ago, looking for an inn in a strange town, being told "no," "no," "no." I saw her Son who promised that women like the woman in the bus station would inherit the earth. Who promised a new world where there wouldn't be that enormous gulf between me and her, between me and the people in the station.

On my drive home after choir, I thought of the thousands of mothers between Mary and the mother I met tonight, including my own. I wonder how much longer we will have to wait for that promise to be filled.

Lord, quickly come.

NECROLOGY

THE REV. RICHARD BENNETT, 87,
in Normal, IL.

A graduate of Nashotah House, he was ordained in 1965 and served parishes in Illinois and Florida.

THE REV. ASHMUN NORRIS BROWN, 83,
in Spring Hill, FL.

He received a D. Min. from the Graduate Theological Foundation and was ordained a priest in 1991. He served parishes in the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast and Central Florida.

THE REVEREND GARY E. CALDWELL, 82,
in Mount Pleasant, IA.

A graduate of General Theological Seminary, he was ordained in 1960 and served

as a missionary priest of the Episcopal Church in the West Indies until 1982.

THE REV. JAMES ALEXANDER CLARKE, 76,
in Cornelia, GA.

He received the Master of Divinity at the School of Theology at the University of the South, was ordained a priest in 1968, and served several parishes in Georgia.

THE REV. CATHERINE KEYSER-MARY, 72,
in New Haven, CT.

A graduate of General Theological Seminary, she was ordained in 1997 and served parishes in Washington and California.

THE REV. WRAY MacKAY, 84,
in Orcas Island, WA.

A graduate and former faculty member of General Theological Seminary, he was ordained in 1954 and served parishes in New York, Indiana, and Washington.

**THE REV. HUGH KING
McGLAUGHON, JR., 62,**
in Winston-Salem, NC.

A graduate and former faculty member of General Theological Seminary, he was ordained in 1989 and served parishes in New Jersey, East Carolina, and Indiana before becoming a full-time banker.

**THE VEN. ARTHUR J.
MONK, 95,**
in Shelton, CT.

A graduate and later president of the board of trustees of Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, he was ordained in 1949 and served in the Diocese of Connecticut. He was named Archdeacon in 1973, and retired in 1982.

**THE REV. CANON
TIMOTEO QUINTERO, 85**
in Honolulu, HI.

A graduate of St. Andrew's Theological Seminary, Manila, he was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1954 and received into the Episcopal Church in 1956. He was founding priest of St. Paul's, Honolulu, and with the help of many others, started congregations on Maui, Kauai, and the Big Island.

**THE REV. JANE CARVER
TURNER, 90**
in Eugene, OR.

A graduate of the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, she was ordained a priest in 1983 and served in the Diocese of Los Angeles, where she chaired the diocesan Peace and Justice Commission.

*Rest eternal grant unto them
O Lord,
and let light perpetual shine
upon them.*



Will
((and))

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